Annual Report

For Year Ended 30 June 2008



Barking Spider Visual Theatre

www.barkingspidertheatre.com.au

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Barking Spider Visual Theatre

Philosophy

Established in 2006, Barking Spider Visual Theatre is a Melbourne-based puppetry and visual theatre company, dedicated to promoting cross-art forms, challenging traditional theatre and appealing to diverse audiences across ages and cultures. We aim to develop, promote and present performing arts in Australia and internationally. Illusion & Transformation are the guiding aesthetic.

Objectives

Barking Spider Visual Theatre is a company aiming for excellence in form and practice and which seeks to work with artists from various backgrounds and disciplines.

Barking Spider's objectives are to:

1. Develop, promote and present performing arts in Australia and internationally

2. Create excellence in the form and practice of theatre, with an emphasis on puppetry and visual theatre

3. Challenge traditional forms of theatre and its stereotypes

4. Utilise strong Australian and Indigenous content

5. Promote cross-art forms in its theatre work

6. Appeal to diverse audiences across ages and cultures



The Barking Spider Team

Artistic Director	Penelope Bartlau
Producer	Michael Agar
Dramaturge	Gilly McInnes
Puppet Designer & Maker	Michael Camilleri
Set Designer	Richard Jeziorny
Set Designer & Performer	Jason Lehane
Lighting Designers	Bronwyn Pringle, Govin Ruben, Damien McLean
Sound Designer	Angie Grant
Music Composer & Performer	Leah Scholes
AV Designer & Stage Manager	Edward Dowling
Stage Manager	Alana Teasdale
Production Manager	Erica McCalman
Puppet Maker & Performer	Justine Warner
Set Maker & Performer	Dan Goronszy
Co-Creator & Performer	Chrissie Shaw
Production Consultants & Performers	Klari & Dashiel Agar



The Barking Spider Board

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All board members are Melbourne-based and are the only members of the incorporated association.

Penelope Bartlau (Artistic Director) is a puppeteer, writer and director, who has worked professionally in film, television, theatre and radio drama for the last 18 years. Penelope trained for 6 months in Commedia Dell'Arte in residence at the Scuola Internazionale Dell'Attore Comico with Antonio Fava in Italy and for a year in Method Acting at the Lee Strasberg Institute in New York City. She also studied Professional Screenwriting at RMIT University and has a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and Political Theory from Monash University. In 2007 she completed a Masters in Puppetry from the Victorian College of the Arts.

Penelope completed a two-month intensive workshop and performance, *Landscapes Within* with Philippe Genty and Mary Underwood in 2006. In 2007, Penelope toured to three major Arts Festivals in India with her work *Hatch* with support from DFAT/Australia Council, Visy and was the recipient of the Handspan Visual Theatre Travelling Scholarship. She has also trained with a number of international master puppeteers, including Ronnie Burkett (Canada), Peter Schumann (Bread and Puppet Theatre, USA), Petr Matasek (Czech Republic) and Kazunori Watanabe/Miyako Kurotani (Japan). She took part in a two-week collaboration with students from the DAMU Art College in Prague, culminating in a performance at the Prague Quadrennial '07. In 2007, she received the RE Ross Trust Playwrights' Script Development Award for *Dispatch*.

Michael Agar (Chair) started as a producer in his late teens. Over the last 27 years he has produced live music, performance events, theatre, radio programs, television documentaries, animation, short films and a feature film. He also ran Australia's only year-round film festival, popcorn taxi from 2000-6, hosting and curating over 120 film events. His work as a stage producer has taken him from producing commercial shows across Australia with grosses in excess of $250,000 and producing anarchic performances involving over 30 artists playing to 20,000 strong Big Day Out main-stage audiences, to intimate

solo shows at Melbourne's La Mama Theatre. In addition to being Chair of Barking Spider Visual Theatre he is also treasurer of UNIMA Australia (Australia's Puppetry Guild affliated with the United Nations) and the Wantok Musik Foundation. He is currently on the board of Victoria's peak screen development body, Open Channel. In years gone by, he was on the boards of the Australian Film Critics Association, Melbourne Fringe Festival, GongHouse, ATOM (Vic) and Gertrude Contemporary Arts Spaces. He holds a Bachelor of Economics and is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia. In his spare time he has a book deal to write about the boom of the low budget feature film from the mid-1990's to the present.

Leah Scholes (Musical Consultant) is the composer for *Hatch*. Leah works as a freelance percussionist in many varied performance capacities. She has worked with the Malaysian Philharmonic, Melbourne Symphony and Queensland Orchestras, and in 2006 she was the principal percussionist in the Australian Youth Orchestra. Leah performs regularly as a chamber musician, and as a soloist she performed with the Melbourne University Percussion Ensemble in 2005. Currently, she is pursuing a passion for collaborative and theatrical performance, creating works with artists from varied disciplines such as puppeteers, circus performers and comedy actors.

In 2003 Leah travelled to Senegal for intensive study of the djembe and sabar drums with Aly N'Diaye Rose, and her interest in music from other cultures is also explored through her role as percussionist in the eastern European folk band *Yggdrasil*. She currently resides in Melbourne and teaches percussion at Melbourne Girls Grammar School.

Leah completed her Master of Music degree in Percussion Performance at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne University, in 2007 where she was awarded the Professor's Prize for the Most Outstanding Postgraduate Recital.

Elsea Bartlau JP has been actively involved in business management for over 32 years, having been a licensed real estate agent in Emerald, Victoria for most of this time. She is also a recognised specialist in antiques and collectibles and was principal of Nobelius Auctions over a similar time.

Scott Gooding (Theatre Consultant) is a graduate for the drama course at James Cook University, Townsville. Apart from a diverse range of acting work in Melbourne, he is a well-established theatre director, having also produced a number of plays at Theatreworks, La Mama, The Storeroom and at Trades Hall. He is artistic director of Vicious Fish Theatre and was nominated for a Green Room Award for his production of *360 Degrees of Separation*. He has also worked in many schools and community centres with the disadvantaged. In 2008 he became the Artistic Director of SPARC Theatre, an initiative of the City of Port Phillip.



Barking Spider History

Barking Spider was formed in 2006 with *Hatch* as it's first production, touring to three major Arts festivals in India in January 2007 (Jaipur International Arts Festival, Ishara International Puppet Festival, New Delhi and Tree of Life Festival in Chennai). This was financially supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia Council, Visy Specialties, Friends of the VCA and the Handspan Visual Theatre Travel Scholarship.

Later in 2007, *Dispatch* (part of the *Hatch*, *Match and Dispatch* trilogy) was developed and first presented as part of Penelope Bartlau's (Barking Spider Artistic Director) Master of Puppetry, at the Victorian College of the Arts. The script for *Dispatch* received an R. E. Ross Trust Playwright's Script Development Award in August 2007. Also, in 2007, Barking Spider Visual Theatre travelled to Europe where various company members collaborated with Czech puppeteers for a performance of *Windows* at the Prague Quadrennial.

Early in 2008, the company co-created an object theatre work, *The Keeper*, with Chrissie Shaw, which premiered at Canberra's Street Theatre, supported by Arts ACT. Barking Spider also works closely with the Melbourne Immigration Museum, developing puppet works for its themed National Days. In 2008, this has included presenting *Chinese Shadow Tales* based on traditional folk tales for China Day, and *Bunraku Baby* - a puppetry presentation of the art and history of Bunraku puppetry, for Visit Kimono: Osaka's Golden Age - a celebration of Japanese culture.

In May 2008, Barking Spider showcased *Dispatch* to an international audience at the ASSITEJ World Congress and Performing Arts Festival for Young People in Adelaide. ASSITEJ is the peak international body representing theatre for young people and youth theatre. Following on from ASSITEJ, *Dispatch* showcased in Melbourne at fortyfive downstairs as part of the R. E. Ross Trust's Flashpoint Season. *Dispatch* will also be presented for a season at the Brisbane Festival in July 2008, as part of the Under The Radar program, with support from the Sidney Myer Fund and Auspicious Arts Incubator.

Barking Spider History ctd…

In November Barking Spider presented *The Biscuit Readings* at The Village Festival in Edinburgh Gardens, Fitzroy. *The Biscuit Readings* was developed and performed by Penelope Bartlau with design advice from Jason Lehane. *The Biscuit Readings* is sponsored by Arnott's Biscuits and will next appear at The Village at Falls Festival in December '08, where Lehane and Bartlau will perform the work together.

Since its inception, Barking Spider has been committed to working closely with indigenous artists. In 2006/7 indigenous puppeteer and dancer, Jacob Boehme was joint artistic director, contributed to the second creative development of *Hatch*, and toured India as part of the company. In 2008, Barking Spider was also instrumental in assisting Jacob obtain funds from Arts Victoria and City of Melbourne for his large-scale community project *Stories from the Birrarung*. In 2008 and 2009, Barking Spider is committed to working with young indigenous theatre technician, Jarrah McGregor and to mentor young indigenous production manager, Erica McCalman as a future producer.



Barking Spider Past Shows

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Hatch: Synopsis

Hatch is the tale of a puppet character, “Little Legs”. He journeys through a series of different worlds and faces a challenge in each, which test his faith and his confidence. Little Legs reaches his final destination, re-discovering lost joy and courage. Little Legs’ journey is reflected by the journey of the two human characters on stage, who themselves go through a parallel process of discovery.

Style: *Hatch* is object puppetry and movement based visual theatre, with musical accompaniment that runs for 50 minutes. Without dialogue, “Hatch” is designed for an all-ages audience, but specifically targeting 4-7 year old children.

Performers: 2 Tours: Ishara International Puppet Festival, New Delhi; Jaipur International Heritage Festival and Chennai Tree of Life Festival, 2007.

Windows: Synopsis

Created collaboratively between artists from the Czech Republic and Australia, is a dialogue-free visual exploration of life after the wall came down in Czech Republic and Germany in 1989. Using sand, found-object glass windows, a rod – puppet angel, physical performance and performer-interactive AV, Windows was “…the hit of the Prague Quadrennial” – Wesley Enoch.

Performers: 3 Tour: Prague Quadrennial 2007

Dispatch : Synopsis

Dispatch is about a puppet character "Sorrel"- a little girl who has died. She arrives in a boat at "the Middle place", an island in the middle of an ocean. The island is guarded by Goddess Maman Brigitte, guardian of the dead, and her handmaiden Gheda. The island at which Sorrel arrives is actually Maman Brigitte's dress: a huge Marie-Antoinette style crinoline constructed out of blue and green silks, fishing nets, sea weed, and treasures from the deep. On the dress are abandoned suitcases - the belongings of the departed.

Barking Spider Past Shows ctd. *Dispatch*

Sorrel goes through the suitcases seeking shelter and refuge, receiving stories and lessons through the contents she finds within. Maman Brigitte and Gheda oversee Sorrel's journey, to guide her towards her ultimate decision: to stay or to go.

Style: *Dispatch* is puppet and Audio/Visual-based visual theatre, employing black light theatre, rod puppetry, an other-worldly sound design. *Dispatch* runs for approximately 50 minutes and is suitable for a teen/adult audience.

Performers: 3. Season: The Shed, VCA, Melbourne, 2007. Tour: ASSITEJ Festival, Adelaide, 2008; FortyfiveDownstairs, Melbourne 2008; Brisbane Festival, 2008.

Cornflakes: Synopsis

Developed in collaboration with Leah Scholes as part of her Masters of Percussion at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2007, *Cornflakes* is an 8-minute percussion piece with a twist. Forget the drums and the triangles, Leah plays an eccentric Mum who creates wild and varied rhythms and object puppets from Cornflakes to the amusement of her seven-year old son.

Performers: 2. Season: VCA, Melbourne 2007.

Chinese Shadow Tales: Synopsis

Three traditional Chinese stories come to life in shadow tales: The Tiger and the Donkey; The Man Who Saved the Moon from The Well and The Man Who Brought Dragons to Life. This show was created for the Melbourne Immigration Museum's Focus on China day.

Performers: 2. Season: Melbourne Immigration Museum 2008.

Barking Spider Past Shows continued

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The Keeper: Synopsis

The Keeper is a gothic tale of lighthouses, bathtubs and ghosts, and of the isolation and deprivation endured by the families who lived and worked on Australian lighthouse islands. The story centres on a puppet character called Connie, and her life as a lighthouse keeper's daughter. The play portrays Australian life long ago, before the advent of automated lighthouses along the rugged, inhospitable coastline. *The Keeper is* based on true accounts of lighthouse keepers' lives and woven into a composite tale of hardship, danger, and fearful gothic imaginings.

In less than an hour, through song, storytelling and the magical art of puppetry of objects, Connie's life is traced, from childhood to boarding school, to her eventual violent marriage and her return to a lighthouse as lighthouse keeper's wife, and finally her time with her elder sister, Dolly.

It's not the hand you're dealt, but how you deal with it.

Style: *The Keeper* is storytelling through object puppetry and song: Suitable for school-age children and general audiences.
Performer: 1. Season: The Street Theatre, Canberra 2008, Cape Otway Lighthouse, International Lighthouse Weekend 2008.

Bunraku Baby

A puppetry presentation and the story of the art of Japanese Bunraku puppetry, held for children 3-11 years of age. These performances show how Bunraku puppetry works with a 6-minute Bunraku skit, a hands-on puppetry experience for the children and an AV presentation.

Performers: 3. Season: Melbourne Immigration Museum 2008.

The Biscuit Readings

A roving performance, Betty Bricher, biscuit reader & avid CWA member, wheels her al-terrain-tea trolley to deliver tea, sympathy and biscuit divination. Betty accompanied by husband Bert, will reveal whether you are more Tim Tam than Barbecue Shape: your inner biscuit will be revealed.

The Biscuit Readings premiered at The Village Festival in Fitzroy's Edinburgh Gardens in November '08, and will play at The Village at The Falls Festival in December. Barking Spider Visual Theatre is sponsored by Arnotts for this event.



Future Developments

The Island

In 2008/09, Barking Spider plans to develop a major theatre work, adapted from the award-winning children's book, *The Island* by John Heffernan. This will be a large-scale puppet production that will tour Australia and beyond.

The Trench is planned as a site-specific theatre-work for 2009. Inspired by the trench space underneath Federation Square, "The Trench" will be a movable-feast-theatrical-experience, taking audiences from the surface beauty of Melbourne down to her under-belly, revealing truth and magic.

The Trench

Developed in conjunction with the Centre to Homeless Persons, *The Trench* is a journey into the world of a homeless person, who, as he reveals his history and his identity, is living and experiential proof of the adage:
Never judge a book it's cover.

It is proposed that *The Trench* will run for or a two-week season during 2009 (in arrangement with Federation Square). However, *The Trench* Barking Spider creative team is available to work at Federation Square on the project from Friday May 1 – Sunday May 17, with a one-week bump-in and rehearsal period from April 24. For two weeks before this date, the team will design & build the show.

Venue for *The Trench* is the trench at Federation Square. The restaurant upstairs is to be Tjanabi.

The Trench will run for approximately 60 minutes. Audience size: 60 (approximately).

Future Developments ctd

Match

Match is the third and final of the trilogy ***Hatch***, ***Match*** and Dispatch. ***Hatch*** was the birth show, ***Dispatch*** the death show, and ***Match*** is the Love show.....

Match is a collaborative work between physical performers/puppeteers Penelope Bartlau and Jason Lehane, and percussionist Leah Scholes. *Match* explores the theme of love and truth: are these things ever truly compatible?

Match is a darkly comic physical piece, performed with no dialogue. The underscoring percussion manipulates the performers, while the performers manipulate clay, and each other.

Match **Synopsis**

Man meets woman. It fucks up. But something keeps them there.

When love goes wrong - if it jumps the tracks, it can turn into a train-wreck of hate, and worse still, indifference. But sometimes in the rubble, love can be hanging on – buried, just breathing, underneath everything. In a wreck, what is the role of truth? When does truth resuscitate and when does it wipe a relationship out?

The medium for this play is wet clay. Clay can be played with, thumped, thrown, flicked, smeared, sculpted and even articulated: it is an incredibly sensual medium. It's a versatile puppet: a whole world can be created in a moment, and destroyed just as quickly. It can be a brick, a body part or a costume. Through the clay and physicality, we will explore the dynamics of relationship - love, hate, truth and sex.

Match will appear in Melbourne Short & Sweet Festival at the Fairfax Studio in December 08. Barking Spider has also just received the news about being the recipient of a Theatreworks Company Development. This grant is for the development of *Match* into a full production for a season in 2009.The work is intended for an adult audience. *Match* is sponsored by Northcote Pottery Supplies

Puppet Impro Slams

In the second half of 2008, through Barking Spider Barking Spider will be putting together a monthly event of puppet improvisation slams. I'll call together puppeteers and "puppet-workers" for the event: the idea being that we can all sharpen our skills, and share ideas while having a bit of silly fun! Dante's is confirmed as the venue for this weekly event, commencing in '09



The Trench: Artist Biographies

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Key Participant Biographies

The following biographies are for key artists involved in the development and presentation of *The Trench,* in addition to the board members Penelope Bartlau, Leah Scholes and Michael Agar (board biographies in Annual Report).

Jason Lehane – Performer

In early 1983 I joined St Martins Youth Arts Theatre where I performed and worked as a company member for the following three years with artistic director Helmut Bakaitis. From there I worked and collaborated with a variety of performers and directors- Peter Oyston at Playbox , VCA Directors school, performers Margaret Cameron and Nico Lathouris, writer Daniel Lillford, actor and director David Branson, writer Daniel Keene and writer and filmmaker Tahir Cambis.

In 1989 I became a founding member of All Human Theatre – an ensemble based theatre company that worked with the physical disciplines of butoh, wrestling and acrobatics. We performed and trained for three years receiving project funding until I left to train in the field of puppetry, travelling to Indonesia for three months to study indigenous forms of puppetry performance and construction. I returned to Melbourne to create *The Travelling Puppet Wagon*, a government funded project for the 1992 Comedy Festival. From 1990 to 1994 I worked with the Victorian State Opera company as a performer and sword fight and stunt choreographer. During this time I worked intensively with visual artist and filmmaker Bashir Baraki to create *The Interview Series*- a body of work consisting of over 30 separate filmed interviews and scenes with actors playing the characters of the Last Supper. The series was part of a cultural exchange with the Irish Government and was part of the *Beyond Belief – Modern Art and the Religious Imagination* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1998.

Since 1990 I have been teaching Acting, specifically Bouffon and fight choreography in Melbourne (St Martins, Monash Student Theatre, VCA, Theatre in Decay) and Interstate (CIA – Canberra, SCAPE – Hobart)

I have worked as a theatre designer and constructed the sets for *Flush (Fringe 2005), The 72 Hour Mime Project (Fringe and Comedy Festivals), All of which are American Dreams (Theatreworks), Horis + Doris(Universal)* (with Ian de Gruchy), *Sad Bird Boy(Short and Sweet), I Love You Bro (Fringe 2007)* and for a number of productions at Monash Student Theatre.

Key Participant Biographies ctd. *Jason Lehane*

In the past 3 years I have been employed at Monash Student Theatre as Technical Manager, directed a 10 minute show for the Short and Sweet festival (which won Best Production 2005), directed an hour long puppet show for the International Puppet Festival *(Sad Bird Boy and other Dreams of the city 2006),* worked as a performer and puppet constructer for the Louise Morris's VCA Masters Performance (*Aviary 2006)* and directed *Play(*Beckett) in 2007 and Scarecrow / Imp of the Perverse in 2008 at Monash. In 2009 *I Love You Bro* will have a season at the Malthouse and I am production designer for the project.

Michael Camilleri – Puppet Designer

Michael Camilleri makes ambitious visual theatre. He works with actors, puppeteers, singers and musicians to create productions both daring and passionately populist. He also makes puppets, for his own shows and those of his friends.

Michael studied Fine Art at the VCA and was a visual artist and set designer for a number of years. The first major theatre show he devised was *The Now Hour*, a musical-fantasy-satire performed at Crystal T's strip club. For the 2004 Fringe a new version of *The Now Hour* won the inaugural Visionary Award.

In 2005 he directed Donizetti's comic opera *Don Pasquale* for Lyric Opera, which was nominated for 3 green room awards, including best director. *Bremen*, his musical puppet show based on the Brother's Grimm fairytale, was awarded the inaugural Fringe Artplay award.

The Golem of Ruckers Hill for Platform Youth Theatre was an action adventure which progressed indoors and out and included battle scenes, circus, fire, and a monster the whole audience entered and travelled inside.

Rossini's *Cinderella* for Lyric Opera combined puppets and clowning with classic opera. He currently studies law part-time and is a happy father.

Angela Grant - Sound Design

A Thai national, Angela is a graduate from the School of Production, the Victorian College of the Arts in 2006, majoring in Sound Design. It was there that she designed sound for various disciplines of live performance such as drama, dance, circus and puppetry. Most recently she designed sound for *Wanderlands* by Sarah Austin (St. Martins Youth Art Centre) .Her designs include *Dispatch* by Penelope Bartlau and *Idja by* Jacob Boehme (VCA Masters of Puppetry), *Sinners,* directed by Melanie Beddie (La Mama Theatre), and a short film, *The Sandcastle*, directed by Robbie Mcewan. During her final year at VCA, she was an assistant sound designer to sound sculpture artist, Dr. Ros Bandt on *Hearing the Hydra*, (Footscray Community Art Centre), a site-specific sound art in 2006 and also to musical director Peter Farnan on *Divino* by Valerie Campo (National Institute of Circus Arts). Currently, she is a sound engineer at ABC Radio.

Key Participant Biographies ctd…

Danielle Goronszy - Puppeteer

Dan is a performer/designer exploring puppetry, circus and physical/gestural theatre for the past seven years. Dan is a founding (2005) core member of Machination Theatre Ensemble, whose first three works, *Fallen Sky*, *Destin* and *Kinder Transport* were a huge success, appearing on the 2006, 2007, and 2008 VCE Drama Lists consecutively. She also currently works with Polyglot Puppet Theatre, Barking Spider Visual Theatre and Wind-up Beanstalk as a performer, workshop facilitator and/or designer. She teaches drama and puppets in the youth justice system. Highlights of the past year include; Community Creative Development residencies teaching puppetry in regional Western Australia as part of 2008 UNIMA Congress and Taiwan's Dream Community for 2008 Dream Parade, where she also performed at the Presidents Square in Taipei.

Justine Warner – Puppeteer

Justine has a BA of Performance Studies (Dance & Drama) 1999 from VUT Footscray. In 2002 Justine toured Europe with *Piccolo's Dreaming*, a roving puppetry piece, performing at festivals in England, Spain, France and Switzerland. Performance experience includes working with Barking Spider Visual Theatre, performing at VCA, fortyfive downstairs, Immigration Museum, ASSITEJ 08 and the Brisbane Festival. Other puppeteering works: *True Blue News* film pilot; *Minmi Grows Up* at Museum Victoria; Number 12 for William May Corp; Rossini's *Cinderella* for Lyric Opera Melbourne; and *The Golem* with Platform Youth Theatre. Justine runs Puppetry workshops for the Footscray Community Arts Centre Holiday Program, and is also co-founder of Little Treasures Theatre (TIE). Justine will be performing for the Polyglot Queensland tour of *Muck Heap* in October 08.